

Paper for the Board

This paper is for assurance and noting

Sponsor

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Date

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Reviewed by

Colum Conway, Chief Executive

1. Summary

This paper sets out the results of the 2019/2020 annual renewal period for social workers in England. It describes the activities undertaken during the renewal period and provides data in relation to the renewal process.

Of the 99,702 social workers registered at the end of 30 November 2020, we have renewed 93,655 (93.9%).

4,992 (4.9% of the 99,702) were removed having failed to renew. This was within our expected range of removals, based on our understanding of removals for failure to renew from the previous regulator.¹

2. Action required

The Board is invited to note the content of this paper.

¹ The percentages have been rounded up to one decimal place.

3. Commentary

As set out in the paper provided to the Board at its meeting on 18 September 2020, the requirement for social workers in England to renew their registration is set out in the Social Workers Regulations 2018 (in particular regulation 13), and the process by which registration will be renewed is set out in the Social Work England (Registration) Rules 2019 (in particular part 7). In accordance with our legislation, renewal of registration for the year commencing 1 December 2020 started on 1 September 2020, and the renewal period ended on 30 November 2020.

At the start of the renewal period, over 99,000 social workers were eligible to renew their registration. In order to inform social workers of the necessity to renew if they wished to practise from 1 December 2020, a number of communications activities were undertaken prior to, and during, the renewal period. Broadly, these activities can be categorised as:

- direct communication with those on the register
- wider communications through our website and social media channels
- direct stakeholder and sponsor engagement
- engagement with employers
- online events and stakeholder engagement through the work of the regional engagement leads

Direct communications

A number of direct communications were sent to those on the register throughout the renewals period. These were sent by email through the online account if a social worker had created one, and by post if this was not the case. Communications were sent on the following dates:

July 2020: letter to all social workers without an online account prompting them to sign up, including the email address which they needed to use to access their account.

1 September 2020: letter and email to all social workers informing them of the start of the renewal period and the action they had to take.

13 October 2020: two reminders sent by email:

1. No renewal submitted
2. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees (this group did not need to complete a renewal application due to the date that they had joined the register)

27 October 2020: letters sent to all UK and overseas social workers who had not yet activated their online account, to remind them to renew.

3 November 2020: two reminders sent by email:

1. No renewal submitted
2. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees (this group did not need to complete a renewal application due to the date that they had joined the register)

12 November 2020: three different communications sent:

1. No renewal started
2. Renewal started/in draft
3. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees

w/c 17 November 2020: letters sent to all UK and overseas social workers who had not yet submitted a renewal to remind them to renew

20 November 2020: phone calls to people who had applied to renew but their direct debit had failed, and four different email communications sent:

1. No renewal started
2. Renewal started/in draft
3. Submitted renewal, not yet paid registration fees
4. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees

25 November 2020: Text SMS to all social workers yet to renew with a valid mobile (attempted around 7,289)

26 November 2020: five different email communications sent:

1. No renewal started, had activated account
2. No renewal started, not yet activated account
3. Renewal started/in draft
4. Submitted renewal, not yet paid registration fees
5. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees

30 November 2020: phone calls to social workers with a valid phone number who we do not hold an email address for, who had not activated their online account and not yet submitted a renewal application. We also sent five different email communications:

1. No renewal started, had activated account
2. No renewal started, not yet activated account
3. Renewal started/in draft
4. Submitted renewal, not yet paid registration fees
5. Joined register from 1 September, not yet paid registration fees

Wider communications

In addition to direct communication with social workers, we used social media to provide information and reminders about the renewal period, and this gained good responses from

individuals and stakeholders. We had good social media engagement, and people shared our message positively with their audiences. Colleagues actively engaged with conversations and acted to support the registration and advice team where necessary.

Our web content was developed from learning through user research and service build, alongside internal relationship building and information gathering. The digital communications team played a key role in the development, refinement and delivery of the renewal service, through concept to user research with social workers, testing, design and implementation. Content was reviewed and updated on a weekly and daily basis throughout the project and was reactive in relation to phone, email and social enquiries.

We also trialled new content methods through the development and delivery of a video walkthrough for social workers, showing them a step-by-step guide to submit their application to renew.

Despite these direct communications with those on the register, telephone call and email volumes were high throughout the renewal period, with social workers asking questions on a range of issues, including how to create their online account, how to complete the application, and in relation to payment of the renewal fee. A number of these calls were lengthy in nature, which affected response times for calls and emails, notwithstanding the increased staffing within the registration and advice team, and our ability to collaborate with colleagues throughout the organisation to provide additional support when needed.

In November, we received 11,014 calls to the registration and advice team, an increase of 4,020 compared to the previous month when 6,994 calls were received. On Monday 30 November 2020, the last day for social workers to renew their registration, the team received a total of 2,215 calls.

Engagement with media and stakeholders

We issued a number of press releases to sector press throughout the three-month renewals period, both proactive and in response to enquiries, which resulted in call-to-action focused coverage, particularly in Community Care.

There were a number of engagement activities that took place with stakeholder organisations through the communications and engagement teams.

With us now working primarily in a digital space, our regional engagement leads adapted to this new way of working and ran a series of online workshops with groups of social workers relating to renewal and continuing professional development (CPD) requirements, with more than 3,000 social workers in attendance across a range of backgrounds and regions. We gathered feedback from these sessions to inform future events throughout the year, both on and offline.

Additionally, we directly contacted key stakeholder groups, including the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), and others, to encourage them to share our message. They also assisted in running their own webinars with our support.

The Chief Social Workers published an open letter to social workers to remind them to renew, and we worked with stakeholder organisations to ensure that they were also reminding their colleagues to complete their renewal application.

Renewal data

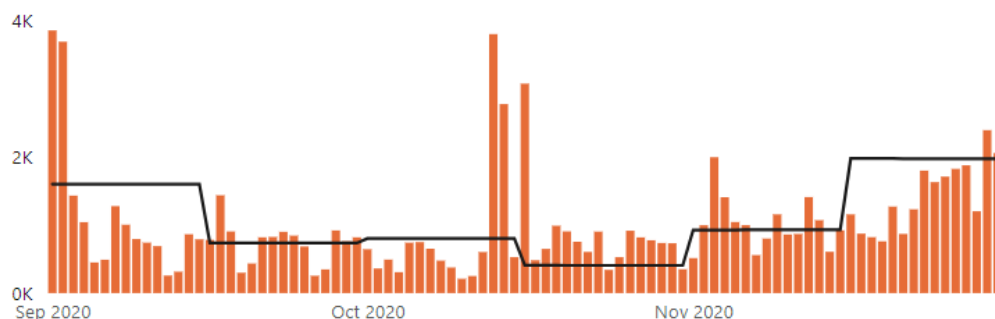
At the start of the renewal period, 99,210 social workers had an entry on the register. During the period 1 September 2020 and 30 November 2020, 2,498 social workers joined the register and 2,006 left.

Progress during the renewal period was tracked to understand how and when social workers were completing their applications. This information was used to help inform when to send direct communications or push social media messaging.

In the absence of information about previous renewal periods, target performance requirements were created. The graphs below show actual performance against these targets across the renewal period. This data will be used to refine communication and engagement activity and registration resourcing for subsequent renewal years.

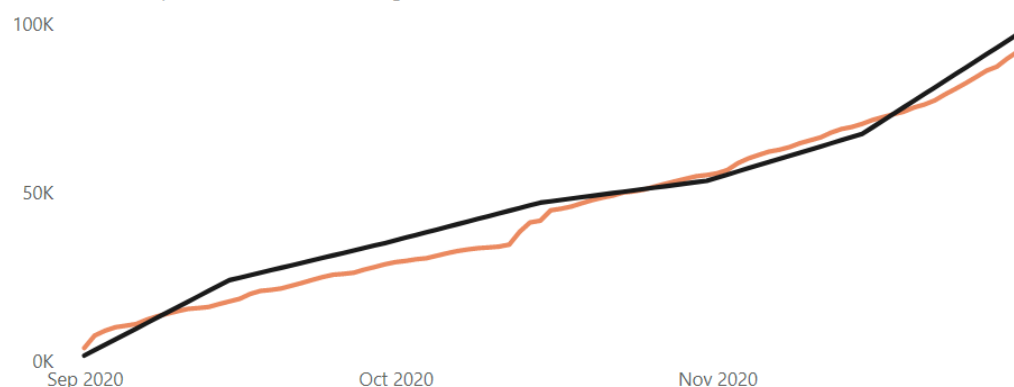
Daily Actuals & Target Renewals Complete

● Daily renewals completed ● Daily target



Cumulative Daily Actuals & Target Renewals Complete

● Renewals completed (cumulative) ● Target



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4,992 (4.9% of the 99,702) were removed having failed to renew. This was within our expected range of removals, based on our understanding of removals for failure to renew from the previous regulator.²

On 1 December 2020, 1,429 social workers had completed a renewal application but had not submitted CPD. These social workers have been given 21 days to provide this, and since that date some have submitted their CPD and have since been renewed. If CPD has not been provided by that date, these social workers will be removed from the register if we do not agree that there is a reason why their renewal should be permitted in line with our guidance. As of 10 December 2020, 479 registrants have provided CPD and have been renewed.

Any social worker who has been removed and who wishes to continue to practise will now be required to complete an application for restoration. They cannot practise whilst we process their application.

4. Conclusion

Despite the challenges of operating a new renewal process with additional requirements relating to CPD during our first year of operation, the 2019 to 2020 renewal process has broadly been successful, with positive collaboration across the whole organisation to ensure that we could meet our aims and statutory requirements.

The majority of social workers engaged well with the new process, and we have received positive feedback on the online application through an end of application survey. The number of social workers removed for failing to submit an application to renew was within the range we anticipated, and the Forge system operated as we expected in most areas, with few system issues over the course of the renewal period.

Throughout this process, we had the task of encouraging action and behaviour change with a new annual renewals cycle. There was also work undertaken to develop social workers' understanding of regulation and what it means to be a regulated profession through our digital channels and engagement sessions.

In January 2021, we will undertake a review of our first renewal period, to determine learning across all areas. Through testing new communications methods and listening to feedback, we are now in a unique position as a specialist regulator to utilise the information and data we have gathered to reflect on the process, as well as our own understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented. We will use this review to identify where and how we can improve the process for subsequent years. The outcomes of this learning will be shared with the Board at future meetings.

² The percentages have been rounded up to one decimal place